John Roberts,
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We all thought we knew what titles of exhibitions should sound like: serious, vaguely poetic, intellectually authoritative. There would be no doubt then that we were in the presence of something significant, historically self-conscious, professionally secure. Jokes, facetiousness, face-pulling and goofiness were tolerable so long as the act of curatorship and the demands of critical categorization were not put in jeopardy.

Throughout the 90's though we have become familiar with the contra or anti-exhibition title, the title that mocks the assiduousness of theory-led curatorship. These are titles that know no decorum or circumspection, in-yer-face displays of rudery and the pleasures of popular culture and speech. Unembarrassed by a lack of intellectual propriety they were avowedly anti-professional and disputatious. Those who devised the titles of recent shows such as "Minky Manky", "Sick", "Gang Warfare" and "Brilliant!" certainly don't want to be thought of as earnest and well intentioned - this is for art nonces who have spent too much time in the '80s reading Baudrillard and Virilio and getting into the "critique of identity". To organise a show today entitled "Identity, Representation and the Dialogic" would seem as smart and vital a move as Tachism's existential gibberings did to many '70's conceptualists.

The truth is, playing dumb, shouting "ARSE" and taking your knickers down has become an attractive move in the face of the professional institutionalisation of critical theory in art in the 1980s. The new generation of British artists have perhaps been the first to recognise this, given, I would argue, their privileged exposure in the '80s' to the systematic incorporation of contemporary art theory and philosophy into art education, particularly at post-graduate level. This has created in certain metropolitan centres (specifically London) a crucial awareness of what was needed to move art forward generationally, to take it beyond the radical expectations and conformities of the new/old critical postmodernisms emanating from New York and cultural studies departments of British Universities. A younger generation has had to find a way through these congealing radicalisms. For some this has meant the chance to free-wheel and play the idiot savant, for others the liberating turn from critical virtue has allowed them to refocus on the theory's underlying social and political realities from a more formally open position. This is why it would be mistaken to identify the new art and it's fuck-you attitudinizing with anything so simple-minded as the "depoliticization" of art, as if this generation had hitched itself gleefully to the brutal inanities of the new Lottery Culture. Despite much of the new art's unqualified regard for the voluptuous pleasures of popular culture (drug references and experiences and the arcana of tabloid TV being common denominators), it does not seek to assimilate itself to popular culture in fazed admiration, as if its only ambition was an anti-intellectual release of libidinal energy. Rather, it treats the aesthetically despised categories and pleasures of the popular - the pornographic, sleazy, abject and facile - as things that are first nature and commonplace and mutually defining of subjectivity and therefore needing no intellectual introduction into art. This is not a generation of artists who in utilising the stereotypes, archetypes, signs and product-images of popular culture and mass culture, employ them as means to revivify

the content of fine art. After postmodernism the bridging of the "great divide" between popular culture and high culture is formally a dead issue.

The "bad behaviour", the journalistic and demotic voicing in the new art, is a way of saying that as the shared and unexceptional conditions of modern subjectivity, these categories and pleasures do not need to be incorporated into art in order to validate them. From this perspective the decisive change brought about by this work is a loss of guilt in front of popular culture, giving much of the new art an affinity with the recurring bid within the history of the avant-garde to reclaim the "real" in the interests of the truth of experience. In this, the conceptual categories and strategies of critical postmodernism (the spectacle, simulation, the deconstruction of representation and identity) have functioned increasingly to distance artists from the pleasures and contradictions of the everyday. If all visual experience is subject to the law of "reification" and all representation is suspect, the representation of the everyday is always being judged as a problem in need of a critique, rather than a site where ideology and its resistance are lived out in all their messy contingency. The critical act of deconstruction makes it difficult for artists to take the truth of their own experience seriously, for it always appears to be invented somewhere else.

There is a way of reading the new art then as a generation moving the critique of representation out of the domain of academic references and into the "street". By this I don't mean that artists now prefer to show in shops - although some notoriously have - but that the culture of art has come to overlap and interfuse with the forms and values of popular culture as a shared culture in unprecedented ways. It is as if art has come to occupy the position of a "way of life" within this culture. This is why the professional critique of representation pursued by the likes of Victor Burgin, Mary Kelly and Hans Haacke, began to appear to this generation as censorious. Such moral strenuousness and the intellectualisation of pleasure looked bathetic, gruesome even, the work of bodies at war with themselves despite the critique of identity. To note the links between the new art in London and the informal arrangements of the new club culture is not new, but it is none the less pertinent for all that. For what is particularly noticeable about the presentation of much of the new work is how it has set out to radically transform art's forms of attention. If in the '70s the dominant form of art's presentation was the sociological display (Haacke, Kelly), and in the 1980s the shopping mall or bank foyer (Jeff Koons, Neo-Geo), today artists have looked to a more informal aesthetic which owes something to the domestic and something to a club chill-out zone. In many instances the gallery becomes a kind of "play area" in which the work on the walls and floor form part of a kitschy installation or cheesy spectacle. Of course, this informal treatment of the gallery space is nothing new (Fluxus, Jonathan Borofsky, Group Material). But in this case what counts is the maximum entertainment value, the fact the "private" moment of encounter with the discrete, individual artwork is disturbed, and exposed to a non-aestheticizing milieu.

One group of London-based artists who have adopted this club-type ambience in pursuit of their own facetious and "anti-professional" ends has been Bank. Since their large-scale spectacle "*Natural History*" at Battlebridge Centre at Kings Cross in 1993, in which the group built a huge urban setting out of cardboard boxes, they have produced a series of humorous and aesthetically diffuse installations at Burbage House, Curtain Road in the East End of London.

Not to be outdone, the titles of the shows are up with the best of recent challengers: "*Wish You Were Here*", "*Zombie Golf*", "*The Charge Of The Light Brigade*", "*Cocaine Orgasm*". Each show involved the presentation of invited artists work as part of a "Bank Art Promotions" spectacle. The work of the artists, rather than being seen "clean" as in a standard mode of gallery presentation become the individual elements of a unified installation, each object serving the greater conceptual unity of the installation. In the first Burbage House show, "*Wish You Were Here*", this took the form of an architectural model. Dividing the gallery space on two floors into separate rooms - some of which were open plan - the gallery was transformed into a congery of Show Rooms: a living room, conservatory, kitchenette/diner, bedroom and bathroom. Each of these spaces was built or decorated by the invited artists. Thus, the living room was covered in hand-printed wall paper by Sonia Boyce and over the front windows David Burrows (a member of Bank at the time) installed a custom-built blind depicting scenes of somnolent, suburban beauty. In the kitchenette/diner Andrew Williamson (a current member of Bank) laid out a table with the remains of a Chinese takeaway over which hung a moderniste mobile made by Burrows, and the walls of the bathroom were grafittied by the Cabinet Gallery in Peckham-to-South Central-LA modern urban stylee. The overall effect was the unambiguous transformation of the work into real estate. Here were a group of artists exhibiting their art without qualification as property for sale, at the same as contributing to the presentation of the gallery space itself as a desirable property.

At the opening show the newly acquired Bank space was put on display for speculative financial perusal. The language and practices of the estate agent, then, transformed the anodyne practice of the installation artist into that of the "creative" interior decorator with an eye on the rich patron. The artist as design-consultant. That Boyce's wall-paper, depicting hands, had strong echoes of Warhol's Cow wall-paper was not fortuitous in this respect. "*Wish You Were Here*" was an elaborate mocking commentary on Bank's (and others) own recently acquired status as artistic lease holders of a commercially unlet space in an up-and-coming area, Shoreditch/Liverpool Street - a process that has lain behind the upsurge of alternative spaces in the '80s and '90s in the East End of London and that has provided the material infrastructure of the new British art. In this respect "*Wish You Were Here*" owed a great deal aesthetically to the dominant simulation paradigm of the '80s. By incorporating the activities of the artist into practices of the designer and estate agent the economic relationship between the artist and the market was laid bare through simulating the mechanisms of salesmanship. There is a sense, therefore, that the installation was very much a known quantity aesthetically despite the novel incorporation of photographs, paintings and objects into the designed space as disruptive social referents. (This approach was explored to considerable effect in "*Natural History*" where paintings of such things as the "Pour Homme" perfume advert, Princess Diana and a Somalian child and Terry Farrell's Charing Cross development, were hung from the ceiling between stacked boxes.) "*Wish You Were Here*" extended the simulation paradigm, even if it had no interest in its professional validation.

In the next show "*Zombie Golf*", however, this model of practice was left far behind in favour of what has become their current modus operandi: the gallery installation as "play pen" and makeshift "set". Transforming the whole gallery into a theatrical backdrop the

artists work was given over to the dominant presence of an exoteric concept. In "*Zombie Golf*" this theming took the form of an encounter between the work and a group of zombies made from plaster casts and modelled on current members of the group (Simon Bedwell, John Russell, Milly Thompson, Andrew Williamson) and their friends. Wandering vacantly and threateningly about the space in a search for "BRAINS" the art appeared under attack.

This direct incorporation of a supposed intellectually suspect aspect of popular culture into the contemplative spaces of high art is of course hardly novel; Bank clearly give a good nod in the direction of the '80s West Coast school of lets-stick-our-favourite-things-in-the-gallery because-that's-what-we-care-about. Mark Rothko is fine, but my David Cassidy love pendant is much nicer. But in the hands of Bank this is given a sharper kind of voice, which not only distinguishes Bank's art from this dumber-than-dumb relativism but gives explicit expression to a widespread tendency in contemporary British art: the use of popular cultural forms, expressions and emblems as gestures of proletarian and philistine disaffirmation. The proletarian and philistine are not the same - which I will come to later - but nevertheless in the work of a number of young British artists in the '90s it makes a conspicuous alliance, taking the political and critical concerns of the work into a very different imaginary space to that of a good deal of contemporary American art. As Patricia Bickers has noted contentiously, but I believe with some justification, in her survey of the new British art The Brit Pack [1], one of the reasons the critical voicing is so different in the new British work in its engagement with popular culture, is that PC culture has such a strong institutional hold on the critical discourses of art in the USA; one only has to look at the Whitney programme to see how social critique has come to be identified with "proper" - academically approved - modes of critical disarticulation.

Bank's use of zombies *without irony* signals, therefore, a very different response by a younger generation of British artists to the crisis of representation and the historical separation between the categories of art and the categories of the everyday. The zombies in "*Zombie Golf*" are not aliens but the avatars of class dissidence and the philistine refusal to separate the cognitive categories of the everyday (Does this pleasure me? What function does it serve?) from the experiences of art. This, however, does not mean the zombie installation mocks the pretensions of the work on display (Dave Beech, Maria Cook, Peter Doig, Sivan Lewin, Adam Chodzko, Martin Creed, Matthew Higgs and John Stezaker), but that it questions its right to exist untroubled by the realities of social division which produces the separation between art and aesthetics, bodily needs and experiences. In this sense, the zombies enact the revenge of a stereotyped proletarian cognition (pure appetite; a body without subjectivity) on the deracinated body of bourgeois culture and the piety of an identity politics that has no place for the voluptuous and the transgressive. This reading finds some credence in the Zombie movies themselves. In George Romero's Night of The Living Dead (1968), the first Living Dead movie, the zombies appear in their massed ranks like an awakened proletariat arisen from their historical slumbers - the worst kind of nightmare for the bourgeoisie. The anti-imperialist sub-text of the movie gives further support to this reading. Although the later Living Dead movies dissipate the anti-American aspects of the early movies, turning them into suburban thriller-chillers for suburban kids, the allegorical function of the zombie remains something unassimilable at a grubby, base-material level. Thus even if the later films represent the domestication of the zombie as

a figure of Horror- Entertainment, the very culture of the Zombie movie continues to produce identifications of class exclusion, shaping the political reading of the sub-genre and its critical status generally.

I would argue, that all this is implied by the non-alien presence of Bank's zombies. By giving the zombies the self-image of Bank members and their friends, the zombies's monstrous subjectivity is internalised. The zombies' voice is made coextensive with that of the organisers. The effect is that the zombies share the space with the work, they may attack it but they don't want to dominate it, they are not out to destroy art but to show what remains bitterly excluded from its presence: the sensitivities and judgments of the non-specialist spectator. Yet, if we might define this absence generally as belonging to the proletariat this does not necessarily identify the philistine with the proletariat. The working-class philistine may be the excluded disaffirmative presence of art's professional self-ratification, but this does not mean that working-class refusal of art's ratification is the excluded truth of art. This sociological formalism is what is wrong with the post-aesthetic followers of Pierre Bourdieu who takes the truth of art to lie solely with its class exclusions. To denounce the categories of art in the name of a philistine common sense judgment is merely to substitute the non-cognitive realities of the exclusion for the cognitive problems that the realities create. The philistine as proletarian may haunt the conditions of art's production and spectatorship, but the philistine is also necessarily an intra and inter art voice of the excluded. For there are power relations internal to the institutions and categories of art which makes it imperative that art continually judges what passes for dominant critical taste. The philistine, therefore, is also the voice of art's bid for critical autonomy, the voice that recognises the congealing power of dominant academic positions in the name of art's critical renewal. As such the "philistine" is a discursive construction which shifts position depending on what constitutes "proper" or "correct" aesthetic behaviour. This is why it is not reducible to an essentialist class position but at times is forced to take up arms against those who fail to acknowledge the academization of their own radical self-image.

In these terms, it is very short sighted to talk about the anti-intellectualism of this new generation of artists just because they are not writing mountains of texts and quoting Fredric Jameson. For there is the unthinking stupidity of the philistine who sees his or her rejection of the dominant discourses of modern art as univocally true, and the thinking stupidity of the philistine who sees the rejection of the dominant discourses of art as a matter of ethical positioning. The latter, in my view, underscores the work of Bank and a number of other young British artists (Gavin Turk, Gillian Wearing, Dave Beech, David Burrows). Yet this is not to deny that anti-intellectualism and the celebration of inanity haven't found a sympathetic voice in the new art culture, but that in the hands of some the dumb-routines, behaving badly and cheesiness, have a specific aim: to unsettle the bureaucratic smoothness of critical postmodernism, particularly now it has become the official ideology of our wider digital culture. As the voice of interruption and disaffirmation the philistine' is a parasite on theory and practice and not theory's enemy. This is why the "philistine" can take on the voice of the intellectual as it can its ventriliquised opposite, as in the case of conceptualism in the early '70s and neo-conceptualism in the early '80s.

Is the category of the "philistine" then another way of talking about the positional politics of the avant-garde? At a formal level perhaps, but if some of the new art adopts a

positional cultural politics it stakes no wider claim on the avant-garde as the bearer of advanced taste outside a common popular culture. This is why the notion of the "philistine" has a content today that distinguishes it in important ways from the art of the '70s and the '80s. As I touched on, many of the younger British artists do not appropriate the forms, emblems and themes of popular culture in order to intellectualise the popular. Unlike the American and British media art of the early '80s and the Goldsmiths generation of the late '80s, these artists see the everyday and its representations as something they inhabit and work from as a matter of course. This leaves the voice of the philistine as oppositional but not exclusionary in its critical powers. There are two primary causes behind this: the waning of the institutional and intellectual force of Modernism, which in the '70s and '80s defined what an art of the everyday should distinguish itself from, and the transformation of popular culture itself under the political and cultural impact of the '70s and '80s into a space of radically expanded subjectivities and alternative forms. As a result what defines the attitude of the most interesting of the new British artists, particularly those working around Bank, is that art and the everyday are mutually defining components of something bigger: the ordinariness of culture. In the process there may be artists who want to assimilate themselves to a passive, post-critical view of the popular, but there are others who continue to see their assimilation to the "ordinary" as an ethical and political challenge. This is why we shouldn't treat the widespread adoption of the pornographic, vulgar and profane in the new art as the coat-tailing of media sensationalism, but a refusal on the part of artists to feel shame about engaging in the everyday through the abject. The general effect has not only been a new sensitivity to the brutalising rituals and tropes of everyday late capitalist culture, but also a greater tolerance for the profane and vulgar as forms of working-class dissidence. It has to be said this is one of the aspects of the new philistinism that has come in for the strongest amount of criticism: namely that artists, particularly middle-class artists are slumming it for egregious effect. For example the work of Sarah Lucas, who in a well publicised work invoked the working-class slang of the playground (two fried eggs and a kebab exhibited on a table) as the basis for an unambiguous work on the gendering of subjectivity. Whatever the truth of the accusation of slumming in the case of Lucas, it nevertheless has to be said that there is a great deal of art around that does embrace the pleasures of the philistine for effect. But there is nothing wrong with that. For whatever the class origins or critical intentions of the new British artists, there is refreshing sense that certain modes of critical decorum are being tested, even pulverised into submission. This has acted to release a new candidness about the representation of the everyday, particularly in the work of women artists.

In fact, the increased tolerance amongst women artists for the vulgar and profane is perhaps where the dissonant philistine voice is at its strongest. Talking dirty and showing your bottom for the sheer delight of it, has become a proletarian-philistine reflex against '80s feminist propriety. Reinstating the word "cunt", and embracing the overtly pornographic and confessional, have become means of releasing women's sexuality from the comforts of a "progressive eroticism" into an angry voluptuousness. A good indication of this is Tracy Emin's unfazed presentation of her own sexual history, *Everybody I've Ever Slept With: 1963-1995*.

Today this breakdown of bodily rectitude is increasingly evident, as younger artists feel no intellectual insecurity about addressing the spectator as embodied. The title of Bank's 1995 Christmas spectacle "*Cocaine Orgasm*" flags this with abandon, even if in logical

terms the title is self-contradictory, and the show's Yuletide cheer was a bit low on baubles and glitter. But the spirit of bodily excess, intoxication and disordered reason is clearly implied. This is the ordinariness of culture.

Is the new art then yet another neo-Dada disruption of art's official and academic identity in the name of the anti-aesthetic? Insofar as the new art takes a certain pride in being gratuitous and facetious this appears plausible. But the new art is not out to denounce art in the name of the "ordinary" and everyday: this is not a rerun of the inverted snobbery of Fluxus for instance. On the contrary, what the new art reflects and participates in is what I would call the increasing popular enculturalization of art; that is the incorporation of art's production and its forms of attention into a culture of art not immediately governed by professional, academic criteria of success. And this, essentially, is what people identify as the clubby nature of the new London-based art. The making of a show or event is part of an informal social network of artists who see the social relations involved in attending to art as important as its making.

Much of the new work is of course finding its way into normal circuits of commercial exchange, but most of the work still continues to be produced for a localised audience. In itself there is naturally nothing virtuous in this. But it does point to what is one of the determining characteristics of the new culture: people make art and show art in contingent response to their circumstances and not out of any idealised or preordered sense of career or abstract sense of struggle. In fact it is the widespread reaction against the traditional artistic identity of self sacrifice and oppositional exclusion that underwrites the informal character of the new art's relations of production and distribution.

The net effect of this is the further discrediting of the idea of the Great Artist; this is the culture of the committed but occasional artist. Thus artists move from medium to medium, voice to voice without worry. In short, what this work reveals is the increasing subsumption of art under the category of the practical. As Sean Cubitt puts it2, art today is an "accumulation of cultural acts, made by thousands", and not the embattled activity of a handful of marginals. With the popular enculturalization of art, therefore, it is inevitable that a distance should open up between the new art and the theoretical strenuousness of the '80s. For in many respects what continues to have theoretical value has been sorted out from what is redundant in a process of cultural assimilation. The theory, so to speak, has been given sensual form.

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1. Patricia Bickers,
The Brit Pack: Contemporary British Art, the view from abroad, Cornerhouse Communiqué No 7, Manchester 1995.

2. Sean Cubitt,
Laurie Anderson: Myth, Management and Platitude, in John Roberts (ed), *Art Has No History! The Making and Unmaking of Modern Art*, Verso 1994, p295.